

Pro Basketball Players Teach Leadership, Teamwork in Senegal

What helps children learn leadership, character and teamwork? The NBA and USAID think one option is sports.

The U.S. National Basketball Association (NBA) has partnered with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the nonprofit Sport, Education & Economic Development (SEED) Project to launch Live, Learn and Play, a program to teach leadership, character and teamwork in Senegal.

On May 7, representatives of the three partner groups gathered on a newly renovated basketball court at the John F. Kennedy High School in Dakar. More than 100 children from participating schools were put through their paces under the tutelage of Gorgui Dieng, a forward with the NBA's Minnesota Timberwolves team, and SEED Project alumnus. Joining them was fellow Senegalese native Astou Ndiaye, a Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) legend.

Live, Learn and Play uses basketball and the values of the game as a vehicle to teach life skills and promote leadership to boys and girls between the ages of 13 and 15 in 20 schools across Senegal. Each school will conduct at least two basketball practices a week and hold games and tournaments on weekends. Practices will take place at all of the participating schools and will include both boys and girls.

Live, Learn and Play includes a coaching-development element with a curriculum designed by the NBA and implemented by SEED. Coaches will implement the basketball curriculum locally. The program includes a mentorship component to provide coaches with a broad support network. The partners plan to expand the program to other countries in Africa.

More than 30 African players have played on NBA teams since Nigerian Hakeem Olajuwon joined the Houston Rockets in 1984. Through NBA Cares, the league has created 37 places to live, learn or play in Africa and 11 times has held Basketball Without Borders Africa camps to promote the sport and encourage positive social change in education, health and wellness.

The league opened an African headquarters in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2010 and launched the Royal Bafokeng Sport Junior NBA development program in 2011.

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